Equality, Diversity and Racism in the Workplace:

A Qualitative Analysis of the 2015 Race at Work Survey

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In partnership with

Foreword

When we published the Race at Work report containing 24,457 responses from employees across the UK, I personally did not want to share some of the shocking comments that I had read when reviewing the survey responses without ensuring a professional analysis of the comments and assurance of their context. I am very grateful for the support that we have had from Dr Stephen Ashe and Professor James Nazroo from the University of Manchester who have undertaken a thematic review of more than 2,000 comments related to racial harassment and bullying and have also examined more than 3,000 comments on senior leadership, more than 5,000 comments overall.

Clear leadership from the top, policy not just on paper but in practice, responsible action from managers and transparent reporting processes have never been more important in the UK workplace. The reported rise in racist incidents following Brexit just reinforces how important this is. A key finding from the Race at Work survey which was completed in the summer of 2015, almost one year before the EU referendum, was that racial harassment and bullying was prevalent.

This report has an urgent call for employers to take action now. With line managers often acting as the facilitators of organisational culture, all employers across all sectors should ensure that managers do not discriminate. Managers also need to be clear on the role they play in identifying and stamping out racist behaviour wherever it exists in their teams.

Another major issue that has been flagged is the need to ensure that wherever possible employees can work in environments that are free from racial harassment and bullying from customers, clients, contractors and service users.

Employers from all sectors must step up and take action now. I commend this hard hitting and authentic report with the voices of workers from across the UK to all. I trust that it will galvanise senior leaders and employers in the public, private and voluntary sectors into bold action that says – this behaviour has no place in our organisations.

I want to say a special thank you to our sponsors BT, Enterprise Rent-A-Car, KPMG, Nationwide and Sainsbury's for their support with the survey, and a huge thank you to all those who took the time to share their stories and experiences that have helped to inform this report.

Sandra Kerr OBE
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Acknowledgements

Executive summary

Since 1968, successive Labour and Conservative governments have introduced legislation to outlaw racial discrimination in employment.[1] And yet, racism and racial inequality have proven themselves to be historically resilient features of the British labour market.

While one in eight of the working-age population is from an ethnic minority background, people from an ethnic minority background account for only one in ten of those who are actually in employment. Moreover, the Equality and Human Rights Commission's (EHRC) recent *Healing a divided Britain: the need for a comprehensive race equality strategy* report, published in August 2016, also found that people from ethnic minority groups have higher unemployment rates than White people.[2]

It was also in August 2016 that the United Nation's Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination reported its 'concern' at the:

(a) the higher rate of unemployment among persons of African and Asian descent;
(b) occupational segregation, with the concentration of persons belonging to ethnic minorities in insecure and low-paid work; and
(c) discriminatory recruitment practices of employers.

It was in this context that the Prime Minister Theresa May announced the launch of 'an unprecedented audit of public services to reveal racial disparities and help end the burning injustices many people experience across Britain'. The evidence presented in this report strongly suggests that this audit should also examine both racial inequality and the racism faced by ethnic minority people *working* in the public sector.

This report builds on the *Race at Work* report that was published in 2015. The *Race at Work* survey was conducted between 28 July and 17 September 2015. In this report we explore further the voices of 24,457 ethnic minority and White British employees aged over 16 years old, currently living in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. 6,076 people took part in the research via the YouGov panel survey, while some 18,381 respondents participated via the public open survey.[3]

Building on the 2015 report, we offer a qualitative analysis of responses given to open-ended survey questions designed to explore the following:

(1) employee accounts of experiencing and/ or witnessing racist harassment or bullying at work; and
(2) How, if at all, employers promote equality, diversity and fairness in the workplace.

In doing so, this report provides further insights into the nature, scale and human impact of racist bullying and harassment in the workplace. In addition to this, we draw further attention to some of the specific barriers that prevent the realisation of equality, diversity and fairness at work.

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[1] For a further discussion of the various legislative acts and subsequent legislative amendments introduced to both outlaw racism in employment and the enshrinement of equality in law, see http://race.bitc.org.uk/all-resources/toolkits.

[2] For further information on the longstanding nature of racial inequality in the labour market, see Nazroo, J. & Kapadia, D. (2013) 'Have ethnic inequalities in employment persisted between 1991 and 2011?' Centre on Dynamics of Ethnicity; and Nazroo, J. & Kapadia, D. (2013) 'Ethnic inequalities in labour market participation?' Centre on Dynamics of Ethnicity.

[3] For a further discussion of the survey methodology employed, see *Race at Work 2015*.

We find that:

- **Racism very much remains a persistent, if not routine and systematic, feature of work life in Britain, thus contributing to the organisation of society in ways that structurally disadvantage ethnic minority workers.** Ethnic minority workers are frequently subjected to racism by colleagues, managers, customers, clients and service users. Racism is experienced in a wide variety of ways, ranging from 'everyday banter' to violence and intimidation. Alongside Islamophobia and antisemitism, crude and overt forms of anti-Black and anti-Asian racism are also prevalent.

- **Experiencing and/or witnessing racism impacts on ethnic minority employees in a number of ways.** This includes having a direct impact on the mental health and emotional and psychological well-being of ethnic minority workers. Racism was also reported to have a negative impact on the careers of ethnic minority employees, reducing opportunities for additional training and career progression. Many ethnic minority workers also reported seeking alternative forms of employment as a direct response to experiencing racism.

- **The promotion of equality, diversity and fairness is inconsistent across workplaces.** On the one hand, some employers promote these values in a variety of ways, sometimes in an extensive manner and on a regular basis. On the other hand, a large section of survey respondents reported that they did not know or that they were unsure of what their employer did to promote equality, diversity and fairness. Some employees even suggested that the promotion of equality, diversity and fairness was 'non-existent'.

- **Some managers were said to have taken a zero-tolerance approach to racism in the workplace, offering support to those on the receiving end of racism. However, it was more common for ethnic minority employees to state that managers were also one of the main culprits when it came to racism at work.** Not only this, managers were also commonly described as being indifferent to racism. When it comes to opposing racism and promoting equality and diversity, this raises serious questions in relation to leadership in the workplace.

- **Trade union representatives were identified as being an important source of support in helping ethnic minority workers to 'speak out' and challenge racism at work.** Such statements were most prominent among ethnic minority employees working in the public sector. However, like managers, it was also suggested that trade union representatives could also be indifferent to racism.

- **Many employees commended equality and diversity practitioners for the role that they played in promoting equality, diversity and fairness and supporting colleagues who had experienced and/or witnessed racism.** However, some ethnic minority workers were critical of the work of equality and diversity practitioners, suggesting that some practitioners did not pay adequate attention to challenging racism and addressing racial inequality in the workplace.

- **Alongside racism, White resentment is a significant problem.** In some cases, White British employees suggested that activities and training promoting equality and diversity were no longer necessary. It was also suggested that equality and diversity activities provided ethnic minority employees with an unfair advantage and preferential treatment. These types of reaction appear to be part of a broader, overall negative, if not hostile, response to equality and diversity work, and indicate that it is

necessary to inform White employees about a) the nature of ethnic minority disadvantage; b) how this is reinforced by racism in the workplace; and c) why Race Relations legislation and equality and diversity duties are still very much needed.

- **In light of the above, it is important that we critically examine what equality and diversity work actually does, including identifying the barriers and obstacles that hinder this work.** This includes thinking critically about the limitations of existing approaches to equality, diversity and fairness, particularly in relation to whether expressions of commitment to equality, diversity and fairness and statements opposing racism are also partnered by clear and visible activity that addresses racism and racial inequality at work.

Listening to the voices of those who participated in the 2015 *Race at Work* survey clearly demonstrates that there is a great deal of work still to be done in terms of developing the structures, practices and resources required to oppose racism and to achieve both equality and diversity in workplaces throughout Britain.

Having reviewed the comments and statements captured by the *Race at Work survey* we provide a further set of policy recommendations. For Government, this includes:

- Commissioning research that explores the ways in which, if at all, employers are fulfilling their equality duties and how employers respond to instances of racism in the workplace;
- Institute new legislation regarding the procurement of government and public sector contracts to ensure that all tenders are subject to an Equality Impact Assessment;
- Proposals for an annual government review into the nature and scale of racism in the workplace and racial inequality in labour market participation;
- Eliminating the costs of employment tribunals as a means of empowering employees to challenge racism at work; and
- Addressing the issue of 'language proficiency' in ways that protect the rights of ethnic minority workers.

For employers, we identify a range of measures focusing on employer leadership, responsibility and accountability. We also detail a number of recommendations in relation to:

- Employer relations with Trade Unions, Employee Network Groups and Diversity and Inclusion specialists;
- Devising equality targets (including a timeframe and action plan for achieving these targets);
- Revising equality and diversity audits, processes and procedures to include reports of racism at work, paying attention to the voices of employees who have experienced and/ or witnessed racism in the workplace; and
- Changes to training and the promotion of equality and diversity.

Contents

Section 1: Key findings from the 2015 *Race at Work* report

Before hearing the voices of ethnic minority workers who have either experienced and/ or witnessed racist harassment or bullying at work, it is important to remind ourselves of some of the key findings of the 2015 *Race at Work* report.

The 2015 report found that 'we are not comfortable talking about race at work'.[4] In fact, 34% of ethnic minority workers and 42% of White employees felt that their colleagues were uncomfortable talking about race.

While 37% of survey participants felt that their colleagues were more comfortable talking about race, 44% of all respondents felt that their colleagues were more at ease talking about age. Furthermore, 42% of survey participants claimed that their colleagues were more comfortable talking about gender.

The 2015 report also suggests that there is a considerable way to go in terms of providing equality, diversity and fairness training. For example, less than 50% of employers offered equality, diversity and inclusion training, and of this only 65% of participants reported that it was mandatory.

The *Race at Work* report also noted that 'racial harassment and bullying within the workplace is prevalent'. In fact, 30% of employees reported that they have witnessed or experienced racist harassment or bullying from managers, colleagues, customers or suppliers in the past year alone.[5] This is an increase in the levels of racist harassment and bullying reported 1-2 years ago and 3-5 years ago.

Other notable statistics from the 2015 report include:

- 32% of all ethnic minority employees reporting that they have **witnessed or experienced** racist harassment or bullying from **colleagues** in the last five years.
- 17% of ethnic minority workers have **witnessed** racist bullying and harassment from **clients, customers and service users**.
- 16% of ethnic minority employees directly **experienced** racist bullying and harassment from **clients, customers and service users**.

Summary

The statistics provided in the 2015 *Race at Work* report clearly demonstrate that racism continues to be a persistent feature of working life for ethnic minority workers. Not only this, experiencing and witnessing racism was reported by employees working in a diverse range of occupations across several employment sectors. The fact that we are not comfortable talking about race at work also raises questions about employees' experiences of equality, diversity and fairness training and how employers respond to reports of racism in the workplace. In the following section, we will offer further insights into the nature of racism at work.

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[4] *Race at Work* 2015, Business in the Community, p.4.
[5] *Ibid.*, p.4.

Section 2: The nature and scale of racism in the workplace

The 2015 *Race at Work* survey recorded several thousand comments and statements from ethnic minority employees who had experienced and/ or witnessed racism at work. This section explores the voices of ethnic minority and White workers in order to shed further light on the nature and extent of racism in the workplace.

> Racism is a system of domination and oppression with a historical basis that divides and organises society in ways that structurally disadvantage certain minority groups on the basis of their ascribed ethnicity or race. It is important to make a distinction between racism and other forms of prejudice and discrimination that do not draw from the domination of race/ethnic minority groups.

Racism is expressed and experienced in a number of ways. The employees who took part in the *Race at Work* survey reported experiencing and/ or witnessing anti-Black and anti-Asian racism, Islamophobia and antisemitism, and anti-Irish and anti-Central and Eastern European racism. Survey respondents also reported experiencing religious forms of sectarianism, prejudice between ethnic minority groups, as well as nationalistic forms of prejudice, discrimination and exclusion (e.g. anti-English, anti-Scottish and anti-Welsh sentiment). In the discussion that follows, we focus our attention on the most common forms of racism recorded by the *Race at Work* survey.

A large number of ethnic minority and many White British employees reported experiencing and witnessing (respectively) racist bullying and harassment at the hands of managers, colleagues, contractors, customers and service users. This included:

- 'Jokes', 'banter' and practical jokes, particularly in terms of accent and the pronunciation of names;
- Name calling;
- Physical violence, threats, intimidation and verbal abuse;
- Racist leafleting and racist music;
- Employers refusing to accommodate and/or recognise faith practices, celebrations and festivals;
- Being subjected to ignorant, insensitive and/or excessive questioning relating to cultural and religious differences;
- Racial and cultural stereotyping, including being judged on the basis of such stereotypes rather than on the basis of job performance;
- Being passed over for promotion and additional training opportunities in favour of White counterparts, including in instances where ethnic minority employees were more qualified and/or already doing the job on a temporary basis;[6]

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[6] This reinforces the findings reported in Business in the Community's (2011) *Race to Progress* report which found that ethnic minority employees felt under-promoted and undervalued.

- Being subjected to excessive surveillance and scrutiny by colleagues, supervisors and managers;
- Witnessing ethnic minority clients, customers and service users being provided with inferior service;
- Customers refusing service from ethnic minority employees;
- Exclusion from social events and racism from colleagues outside the workplace, including work-organised social events and informal gatherings.

While some ethnic minority employees shared their experiences of racism by describing a single incident, other employees reported experiencing more than one of the examples of racist discrimination, exclusion, harassment and bullying listed above. What is more, many ethnic minority workers also reported that they had experienced and/or witnessed racism on a regular, if not systematic, basis. It is also notable that the accounts of racism offered by ethnic minority workers were also echoed by many White British employees who also recognised and perceived the entrenched nature of racism in the workplace.

> A line Manager on a daily basis would make racial comments towards me and would often try to cause an argument. I reported this to my Human Resources department and her manager (White & Black Caribbean, male, 25-34 years old, clerical)[7]

> It is a common problem with customers calling in and requesting only 'English' advisors to speak to…Senior customers are the worst for racial discrimination. It happens daily (White British, female, 45-54 years old, clerical)

> From customers on a daily basis – it is part of the job. I ignore or address the behaviour directly depending on severity (White and Black Caribbean, female, 55+ years old)

Racist jokes and banter were among the most common forms of racism reported by ethnic minority workers.

> My manager called me a P**i in front of the team. Racist jokes were made while I was in the room and no one stepped in to say it was inappropriate (Indian, male, 35-44 years old, clerical)

> People make jokes about your background and religion and comments about current happenings without having complete knowledge of it and when pointed out say "you have no sense of humour" or "you're not a team player" (Pakistani, female, 35-44 years old, education)

While the people making racist jokes often point out that ethnic minority employees consider such jokes and banter to be acceptable, it must be acknowledged that in White dominated environments, ethnic minority employees often feel compelled to do so. As one of the survey respondents below suggests, racist jokes and banter can be a form of 'passive-aggressive bullying'. Racist jokes and banter are also just one of the ways in which racist stereotypes are reinforced and reproduced. Moreover, when racist jokes and banter are opposed, it is

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[7] When completing the survey, participants were asked the following questions: 1) 'Ethnicity - To which of these groups do you consider you belong?' and 2) 'Do you regard yourself as belonging to any particular religion, and if so, to which do you belong?'. Throughout this report we have used the categories with which participants self-identified. For a full list of the categories available to participants, see Appendix One: Ethnic identity and religious affiliation questions & categories. It should also be noted that while survey participants self-identified with these categories, they have done so within a limited set of options. This approach often displays two limitations: 1) It does not capture the range and multiple categories that survey participants might identify with; and 2) It employs and reproduces racially exclusive categories.

commonly reported that the person making the joke denied that they are being racist, claiming that they are not prejudiced against ethnic minority people. It is also common for people making racist jokes to deny they are being racist by claiming that such forms of 'banter' are not underpinned by any sort of hurtful intent or malice. In responding to such instances, it is important to recognise and explain that even if particular instances of racism are not underpinned by hatred, intent or malice, racism undermines the identities and status of the groups and individuals targeted, and is often used to justify discriminatory practices, and results in racial inequality.

In January, the former Prime Minister David Cameron suggested that 'it was much harder to see open discrimination and blatant racism of decades gone by'.[8] In contrast, the *Race at Work* survey clearly shows that ethnic minority employees still face the 'open' and 'blatant' forms of racism that the former Prime Minister and others often suggest has dissipated, if not disappeared completely. This evidenced by the many examples of crude and explicit forms of racism provided by ethnic minority and White British workers.

> For my birthday an all-White floor of human resources professionals, my peers, sang happy birthday, gave me a cake and a card. As I opened it one of them, female blonde hair blue eyes, told me they choose it because it looks like me. It was a monkey on a sun lounger. I'm a Black male. No one challenged her. They all continued to smile (Black Caribbean, male, human resources)

> A contractor made monkey noises and placed bananas on the desk of my Ghanaian colleague (White British, male, 45-54 years old, construction)

> I worked with a colleague who would constantly have loud discussions about 'Black on Black crime' and why Black people shouldn't complain about police harassment as 'Black on Black gun and knife crime' is so prevalent. I complained to a manager who witnessed the conversation, but nothing was done about it and I was made to feel like I was creating a fuss about nothing (Black African, female, aged 45-54 years old, education)

> The construction industry is one of the last places left where people from grassroots to senior managers can openly refer to workers as "w**s", "n*****s", "P***s"…It happens endlessly, and Nazi symbols adorn the walls of the toilets, "fuck off you P**i scum" (White British, male, 35-44 years old, construction)

The quotations above clearly show that so called 'overt' forms of racism were expressed and experienced in ways that have been around for several decades. Black and Asian employees reported that this was most commonly expressed in terms of being told to 'go home' and 'go back to your own country'.

> White client came into reception and started racially abusing Pakistani colleague telling him to "learn to speak English" and "get out of England" and "go back" to his own country and "stop taking money off White people". My colleague was born and bred here and speaks perfect English! (Black Caribbean, female, 45-54 years old, Clerical/Legal)

Such expressions of racism reinforce the idea that Britain is a 'White Country', thus denying Britain's history as a multiracial and multicultural nation.

Ethnic minority workers also shared their experiences of being subjected to more subtle and less explicit forms of racism. This included patterns of behaviour where ethnic minority employees were deliberately ignored and treated with disdain and impatience. This also

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[8] *Sunday Times*, 31st January 2016.

included White colleagues using a different tone of voice and body language than they would normally do when talking and interacting with White colleagues.

> It is very subtle but often managers will randomly exchange my religious identity for another e.g. Muslim for Hindu etc. They know what my religion is. It is clearly racist behaviour. I am often left out of social meetings. Because it is so subtle it is difficult to pin point but I know it exists due to the number of times it happens from the same people (Indian, female, 45-54 years old, retail)

> We had a manager and colleagues that were nasty to everyone. Aggressive in tone of voice and even shouted regularly. Rude and plain nasty. Had staff in tears…I was effected by it all. My doctor signed me off (Black Caribbean, female, 35-44 years old)

Racism is often expressed in ways whereby different religious groups are represented as being a racial group. For example, Muslim and Jewish employees reported experiencing Islamophobia and antisemitism whereby they were represented and stereotyped in negative ways and that these stereotypes were reflected in the attitudes and behaviours of, and relations with, colleagues, managers, customers and clients.

> Most recently, during the aftermath following a global terrorist incident, I personally witnessed some bigoted views from a number of employees making stereotypical comments against those from the Muslim faith (Pakistani, male, manager in the public sector)

> A client referred to me as a potential terrorist because of my ethnic background. I reported it to senior management. It was raised at a senior level within the client organisation. The individual was reprimanded (Pakistani, male, legal)

> Some colleagues told me about a meeting they went to with my former boss who is Jewish. They decided to order starters to share and the rest of them ordered pork-based starters so that he couldn't have them. They also made a lot of jokes behind his back. As all the people involved were more senior than me, I didn't say or do anything about it. It made me uncomfortable working there and was one of the reasons why I left (Any other Asian background, female, 55+ years old)

> I was in a conversation where somebody was referring to a "Jew". I am Jewish and the comments were insulting. The comments were that Jews are rich and spoilt and always get what they want and are a damage to Islam. This is a general statement but was very hurtful to hear as the group did not know I was Jewish (Other ethnic group, female, transport and distribution)

Expressions of islamophobia also included broader forms of anti-Asian racism, such as non-Muslim employees being accused of being a terrorist.

> A White colleague of mine accused a Sikh member of staff of being a terrorist as he wore a turban and she wondered if he kept a bomb under it (White British, female, 55+ years old, manager/ senior administrator)

As the quotations throughout this report already indicate, many ethnic minority women have reported experiencing racism at work. Published in 2012, Business in the Community's' *Leadership and Cultural Identity* report found that:

- 90% of ethnic minority women believed they 'needed to leave their culture behind to move forward in the workplace'; and that

- '40% of Bangladeshi/Pakistani women reported that they believe the clothes they wear for religious reasons shaped the way in which they are seen, with assumptions being made'.

In 2015, the *Race at Work* survey recorded the experiences of Muslim women who had either been asked to and/ or felt pressurised into removing religious clothing. Not only this, it was also suggested that wearing a hijab could also have bearing on a Muslim woman's suitability for particular roles. At the same time, Section 4 demonstrates that one Muslim women who did not wear a hijab was accused of being a 'fake Muslim'.

> I wear a head scarf and when I first started out one of the employees would call me "towel head". I was afraid to speak out at first because I didn't want to be victimized. However after a couple of weeks I decided to speak to my line manager and they sorted the issue out. I no longer work with that colleague (Indian, female, aged 35-44 years old, skilled manual work)

> A colleague of mine wears a headscarf to work and she was told she needed to take it off as it was clogging up her ears and he made some other comments about her religious beliefs and that she shouldn't be there (Any other mixed background, female, 25-34 years old)

> A client told me that a new recruit who was a Muslim and wore a hijab would be unsuitable for the role I had employed her to do because she would have to deal with Jewish businesses. I reported this to my line manager and asked if I could remove the client from the project but I was not allowed to do so (White British, female, voluntary sector)

These quotations echo the findings presented in a recently published report by the [House of Common's Women and Equalities Committee](#) which found that Islamophobia, discrimination and stereotyping have an adverse impact on Muslim women in terms of recruitment, in-work progression and their everyday experiences at work.[9]

Ethnic minority employees also reported experiencing racism as a form of cultural domination in which they felt pressurised to, or were directly asked to, conform to 'White British' norms and cultural practices. The first quotation below is another example of the way in which racism can be experienced in gendered ways: that is, being forced to conform to what is often framed as being 'acceptable', or so called 'normal', masculine culture.

> Being coerced & cajoled into drinking alcohol despite being against religion (Pakistani, male, 35-44 years old, manager/ senior administrator)

> Being told, almost daily, that the food I eat is "weird". Not one colleague even tries to pronounce my name and anglicises it so it sounds nothing like my name. Constant remarks about my "foreignness". I think they excuse it as banter, which I assume is

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[9] In March 2015, the EHRC published the results of its call for evidence on 'religion or belief in the workplace and service delivery', which noted that many participants

> had encountered hostile and unwelcoming environments in relation to holding, or not holding, of a religion or belief. The issues raised concerned the recruitment process, working conditions, including wearing religious clothing or symbols, promotion and progression, and time off for religious holidays and holy days. Some reported that particular beliefs were mocked or dismissed in the workplace or classroom [and] the expression of hurtful and derogatory remarks aimed at particular groups.

another word for passive-aggressive bullying that is socially acceptable (Any other mixed background, female, 25-34 years old, professional or higher technical work)

The *Race at Work* survey suggests that 'anglicising' names is commonly encountered by ethnic minority employees working in call centres. This finding also builds on the 2009 Department for Work and Pensions report on *A test for racial discrimination in recruitment practice in British Cities* which found that

> There are no plausible explanations for the difference in treatment found between White British and ethnic minority names other than racial discrimination.

What the *Race at Work* survey confirms is that discrimination in relation to names occurs both in the recruitment process and in the workplace.

In addition to 'anglicising names', some ethnic minority employees were also instructed to speak English at work.

> My company CEO told everybody on the conference that no one is allowed to speak any other language than English (Any other White background Mixed, female, retail)

> Recently we stopped to talk our own language…We have been bullied by the manager and she said we don't have a right and she will take action even if we speak in the break. She completely protects the English community but not us (Muslim, female, clerical finance)

In addition to the forms of cultural control around speaking English at work, language proficiency was often cited to justify why ethnic minority employees were not promoted. In some cases this was used to justify why ethnic minority employees had been passed over in favour of a White British co-worker. A perceived lack of language proficiency also limited recruitment and access to training opportunities, and in other instances led to demotion and unnecessary and excessive surveillance and scrutiny by managers and supervisors. As the quotations below demonstrate, this was most prevalent among ethnic minority workers in the public sector

> I have witnessed racial discrimination in the recruitment process. I have had to fight to have new staff in my team who have English as a second language...Despite the concerns raised by others that the foreign workers had too strong accents to be understood by customers, they have proven to be successful with no communication problems (Other ethnic group, female, 45-54 years old, education)

> A colleague who was perfectly capable and had been doing most of the role already was told she would not get the job as her English was not as good as the other woman who applied, despite already doing most of the job she was applying for. Seemingly she was good enough to do it when she was not being paid appropriately for it and they needed her to do it (Female, 25-34 years old, medical and health services, preferred not to state ethnicity)

> Was denied promotion because the trainer felt my English accent was an issue (Black African, female, public sector)

> I have a colleague who has been blocked from seeking a promotion (or any other development opportunities) because he has "bad English". He has a degree from a British university and produces high quality written work that rarely needs amending. He just has a strong Malaysian accent but I and others can understand everything he says (Any other mixed background, female, public sector)

I was promoted to a new team, I worked on the team doing work that I had been doing for over 15 years when I was told that I had not passed my probation...I was immediately demoted and pushed off the team. There was no point in complaining because the decisions were made behind my back with the full knowledge of three senior White managers...I was once told that ethnic minorities like me speak and understand English differently to my white colleagues. This is despite being raised and educated in the UK (Indian, male, public sector)

I was told by my previous line manager to send her emails to read prior to me sending it out. She feels that just because I'm from a BAME background that my English is bad (Chinese, male, 55+ years old, education)

2 Indian colleagues were told that their command of English is poor and they should consider training or a different job (White British, Female, 45-54 years old, education)

I respond to several ministerial correspondence that have to be approved by my line manager and on several occasions she has stated that she thinks I am writing in a foreign language and not English. I can only write English and not any other language. She keeps saying I am underperforming and yet I am the only one in the team with PPM skills, I do all the projects plans, manage the team's risks and yet they don't count in my performance evaluation. The manner in which she talks to me is different from my colleagues. I am racially different from them all (Black African, female, public sector)

The racism issue is very subtle like criticising your style of English writing (Indian, female, public sector)

Further to the discussion above of what has been described as 'subtle' forms of racism, these quotations suggest that accent and language proficiency is another example of how racism can be expressed and experienced in non-referential ways: that is, racism is expressed and experienced without any clear or obvious reference to a racial group or to racial characteristics and signifiers such as skin colour. This is evident in the examples above where call centre customers asked to speak to 'English advisors' in response to what they consider to be a 'foreign accent'. In these instances, accent and language proficiency serve as a proxy or a substitute for racial categories and racial signifiers (e.g. skin colour).

Summary

The large number of respondents reporting that they have either personally experienced and/or witnessed racism should be read as evidence that racism remains an entrenched feature of workplace culture for a large number of ethnic minority people in Britain.

As we have shown, ethnic minority employees reported being subjected to racism by colleagues, managers, customers, clients and service users. In addition to this, the discussion above provides further evidence of the variety and often interconnected ways in which racism is expressed and experienced. Not only this, the evidence provided by the 24,457 employees who took part in the *Race at Work* survey demonstrates that racism is commonly a near constant, if not daily, feature of working life for ethnic minority employees.

The evidence presented in this section raises a number of important issues that must be addressed. The issue of language proficiency is perhaps one that in policy terms is the most immediate and pressing, particularly given the [Prime Minister's](#) recent decision to announce an audit of public services to reveal '[racial disparities in public service outcomes](#)'.

On 2 August 2015, the Conservative Government announced plans to introduce a '[Draft code of practice on the English language requirement for public sector workers](#)'. Published on 13 October 2015, the Minister for the Cabinet Office, Matt Hancock MP used his foreword to 'The Code' to state that these proposals fulfil the Conservative's 2015 general election manifesto pledge to 'ensure that every public sector worker in a customer-facing role', such as NHS workers,[10] police officers, social workers, council employees and teaching staff and assistants 'must speak fluent English'.

'The Code' sets out 'considerations public authorities need to take into account when deciding how to comply with this new legal duty, without creating more red tape in the recruitment of public sector staff'. It also states that 'Employers must satisfy themselves that an individual has the required level of fluency for the role they will be undertaking, whether an existing or potential new member of staff'.[11]

Published on 21 July 2016, the latest version of '[The Code](#)' states that when assessing an employee's 'level of language proficiency'

> Fluency does not relate to regional or international accents, dialects, speech impediments or the tone of conversations.

'The Code' also states that

> A complaint about a public sector member of staff's accent, dialect, manner or tone of communication, origin or nationality would not be considered a legitimate complaint about the fluency duty. Public authorities should make this clear in the terms of their complaints policy.

While these guidelines regarding fluency are important, it is deeply concerning that the government proposes handing responsibility to public sector managers to determine 'how to comply with this new legal duty'. As the evidence above demonstrates, an alleged lack of language proficiency has resulted in discrimination in recruitment, restricted access to training and personal development opportunities, demotion and bullying and harassment from managers and supervisors. In this climate, it is not appropriate to hand over such responsibility to the public sector without clear guidelines and at least setting up an independent body with responsibility for ensuring that these new legal duties do not further contribute to racism and racial inequality at work. Nor is it appropriate to introduce these duties without also introducing legislative provisions which protect the rights of ethnic minority employees, especially in terms of ensuring that, if necessary, employees are given the opportunity and financial support in accessing additional learning support.

We strongly recommend that these proposals are not implemented. Instead, the government should hold a consultation on how the issue of language proficiency already contributes to racism and racial inequality in both the public and private sectors. This consultation should also consider how the rights of ethnic minority workers in a multilingual nation can be further protected through a legal right to have their 'language proficiency' assessed free of charge

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[10] The extent of racial inequality in the National Health Service has already been documented in Roger Kline's (2014) report titled '[The "snowy white peaks" of the NHS: a survey of discrimination in governance and leadership and the potential impact on patient care in London and England](#)', which highlights that

> there remains a very significant gap between the composition of Trust Boards and national NHS bodies, and the rest of the workforce and the local population to whom services are provided. Research evidence suggests this may well adversely impact on the provision of services across [London] and denies the NHS the potential contribution a diverse leadership could make.

[11] '[Draft code of practice on the English language requirement for public sector workers](#)', p.8.

by an independent expert. Moreover, this consultation should also feed into the aforementioned audit of 'racial disparities in public service outcomes' by exploring how the issue of language proficiency affects both staff working in the public sector and how 'race affects the way [people] are treated by public services'. Not only this, Roger Kline's (2014) report into The "snowy white peaks" of the NHS: a survey of discrimination in governance and leadership and the potential impact on patient care in London and England' and the EHRC's recent 'investigation in the Metropolitan Police Service' both provide evidence that this audit of public services must also assess the standard of equality, diversity and inclusion training offered in the public sector, the ability of public sector managers to address reports of racism by both staff and service users and how inadequacies in these areas impact on service provision.[12]

In the following section we examine the impact that racism has had on ethnic minority employees who took part in the *Race at Work* survey.

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[12] In September 2016, the EHRC reported that 'ethnic, gay and female officers and staff…who raise complaints of discrimination expect to be victimised and fear reprisals, such as being denied promotion…'. The EHRC report also noted that

Some managers lack the skills and confidence to handle difficult situations, particularly where these relate to diversity. This lack of confidence in handling difficult situations is particularly evident regarding race.

What is more, the EHRC also found that the

Department for Professional Standards (who have a central role and also deal with all public complaints that come in to the Metropolitan Police Service), does not always correctly identify cases of discrimination, especially where it is less overt.

Moreover, the

…training for staff, officers and managers that was being delivered by the MPS in the time-period of our investigation gave insufficient focus to diversity.

Section 3: The impact of racism

In this section, we explore the impact that racism has had on ethnic minority workers. In doing so, we also highlight some of the challenges and consequences faced by ethnic minority employees who have tried to challenge racism in the workplace.

The 2015 *Race at Work* survey offered participants the opportunity to share their stories of experiencing, witnessing and trying to challenge racism at work, revealing that racism has impacted on a large number of ethnic minority employees in a number of ways. In some cases, attempts to challenge racism were said to have had a 'successful' outcome/ resolution.

> Reported it to the manager who then supported me through it (Indian, female, 35-44 years old)

However, several White British respondents reported witnessing their ethnic minority colleagues being subjected to racism, leading some to suggest that racism had become an accepted and for them normalised, if not inevitable, part of working life, particularly for survey respondents working in the public, retail and service sectors.

> I work in social housing so prejudice is not uncommon (White British, male, aged 35-44 years old)

> Working in retail you are unable to do anything about it (White British, male, aged 35-44 years old, retail)

> A colleague described a service user being racist towards him. He sees it as part of the job – it happens a lot and he lets it wash over him (White British, male, retail)

It is important not to presume that ethnic minority workers simply let racism 'wash over them'. As the discussion below demonstrates, racism has had a profound emotional and psychological impact on many ethnic minority employees. The discussion below will also further demonstrate that feelings of resignation and disempowerment are often further exacerbated by a lack of leadership, representation, managerial indifference and racism from managers.

The suggestion that racism was a routine part of working life was often a direct response to being told that 'the customer is always right'. What is more, the notion that 'the customer is always right' often limited what employees felt they could do to challenge racism:

> Customers often say hurtful or inappropriate things, if I feel they are picking on an individual I will step in but in our organisation the 'customer is always right' so we are only allowed to go so far (White British, female 45-54 years old)

It was also suggested that racism was an engrained feature of life at work, and that if respondents tried to challenge racism this would have a negative impact on their chances of promotion.

> Being overworked, long hours. High expectations, no training given in the new job. Being spoken down to. Previous staff had been bullied as well. Senior managers did not address the issue. I spoke to senior management, the Union and I was eventually moved out of the situation. I missed a promotion opportunity (Indian, female, manager in the public sector)

Being employed on fixed-term and 'zero-hour' contracts also left some ethnic minority and White British employees feeling unable to challenge racism by virtue of their precarious employment status.

> Not said anything as on a zero hour contract and need the money (Any other mixed background, female, 35-44 years old, Media/ marketing/ advertising/ public relations & sales)

> I submitted a report to line management but they said not to rock the boat especially as I was only in a temporary post (White British, female, 55+ years old, clerical/ secretary)

While many ethnic minority employees felt able to either go to their equality and diversity officer or trade union representative, the lack of any recognisable form of leadership and representation prevented many employees from making a complaint or 'taking action'.

> I did nothing about the incident as I am not in a union (Black Caribbean, female, 35-44 years old, clerical)

In light of the fact that some employees received little or no support inside their place of work when it came to 'speaking out' against racism and the forms of disempowerment and acceptance that this often engendered, it is also concerning that other respondents were put off seeking recourse through other channels, for example through an employment tribunal.

> You can't do anything otherwise you are victimised and stitched up and will lose your job. There is the law but who can afford the legal fees and find a solicitor to take your case. Also the general perception is tribunals will rubber stamp the decision in favour of the employer who has resources to hire top lawyers. If you look at employment tribunals, how many are members of ethnic minorities? (Pakistani, male, legal services)

Experiencing and/or witnessing racism also led some respondents to ask for a transfer to another location or another department within the same organisation/ workplace.

> My line manager didn't deal with it [report of racism]. So I had to ask for a transfer openly in the group chat. Even to do so, I waited 3 months to be finally transferred to another store (Chinese, female, 55+ years old, retail)

The above example is also indicative of the way in which there was often a failure to deal with reports of racism in a timely manner. In other cases, ethnic minority employees felt compelled to seek alternative forms of employment.

> I wound up quitting a job and company I loved and my career has been a series of hiccups since, rather than the smooth progression it had been (White and Asian, female, 45-54 years old, manager/senior administrator)

Racism impacted on the emotional and psychological well-being of ethnic minority employees in a number of ways. This ranged from feelings of humiliation, ridicule, belittlement and worthlessness to a loss of confidence. Witnessing how manager's responded to instances and reports of racism, as well as fearing that there would be repercussions, also prevented some ethnic minority workers from reporting racism.

> Every other day I was being verbally abused and humiliated by my manager in front of my colleagues. If I ask her any question she would answer in annoying tone "what I am busy" and "I have to stop doing what I am doing for you" (Indian, male, 25-34 years old, manufacturing)

One of my colleagues reported racism at work, instead management mistreated him and he ended up with depression. That's why myself I don't report anything about it because I know I will be victimised (Black African, male, public sector)

Senior Manager belittled me in front of staff and had impossible expectations of my role. Made me feel inferior for not being able to do more than seven tasks at once (Indian, female, 55+ years old)

Constantly criticised, made to feel worthless by the manager. Nothing can be done as all managers stick together (Indian, male, 35-44 years old, clerical).

Ethnic minority workers also reported suffering from anxiety, stress and depression.[13]

I did not do anything about it [racist bullying and harassment], it caused me stress and anxiety issues now from getting depressed from being overlooked for promotion due to the colour of my skin (Any other Asian background, female, clerical)

Reported bullying and harassment and managers did nothing. So reported to Head of Human Resources who investigated but the final outcome was there was no case to answer even though there were cases where colleagues felt bullied and harassed. Simply not believed…Covered up. Reported to CEO again and NO appropriate action taken such as dismissal even when I have been caused a personal injury from the stress caused (Indian, male, 35-44 years old, public sector finance)

The 2015 *Race at* Work report also highlighted that many ethnic minority employees do not feel supported or valued by their managers. In the previous section we noted that, in comparison to their White colleagues, having their job performance more heavily criticised was one way in which ethnic minority employees experienced racism. This impacted on some ethnic minority employees who felt an added pressure to ensure that their work 'was up to standard'.

The manager is trying to make me feel like I had to leave because he had a personal problem with me so I just ensured that my work was done correctly so no grounds for him to fire me (Indian, male, 55+ years old, Media/ marketing/ advertising/ PR & sales)

Some ethnic minority workers also stated that they did not want to or felt unable to share or revisit their experiences of racism, noting that it was 'Too bad and too personal to put into words', or that they were 'unable to speak about it' or that they would 'prefer to forget about it'.

I don't want to recall the details of it; it is too upsetting (Indian, male, 55+ years old, education)

Comments and quotations such as those noted here are indicative of the way that experiencing racism can have a lasting, if not traumatic, impact.

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[13] In the previous section, we have highlighted that racism had become a routine/ reoccurring part of life at work for some ethnic minority employees. Recent research has shown that repeated exposure to racism has had negative long-term effects on the mental health of ethnic minority people in the UK. See Wallace, S., Nazroo, J. & L. Becares (2016) 'Cumulative Effect of Racial Discrimination on the Mental Health of Ethnic Minorities in the United Kingdom', *American Journal of Public Health*, Volume 106, Number 7, pp.1294-1300.

Summary

The voices of ethnic minority employees presented here demonstrate the different ways in which racism can have a profound impact on the emotional and psychological well-being of ethnic minority workers. This provides further weight to the argument that employers should take more seriously the duty of care they have to their employees. Managerial indifference, alongside the notion that the 'customer is always right', have contributed to feelings of acceptance and disempowerment. This provides acute insights into some of the ways in which racism is reproduced and normalised, if not legitimised, in the workplace. One of the consequences of this is that it has led to some ethnic minority employees seeking transfers and alternative forms of employment.

These findings further add to those presented in Business in the Community's (2010) *Aspiration and Frustration* report which found that 'employers with a historic reputation for institutionalised racism are still seen as unwelcoming to some ethnic minority groups'. The 2010 report also highlighted that key high status/ profile professions such as politics, medicine, banking/ finance, legal/law, education and the media, are considered to be 'closed off' to ethnic minority employees. In light of the evidence presented above, and the evidence presented in the 2010 report, we suggest that further research is carried out to determine whether contexts of employment, particularly whether moving jobs in response to racism, have a detrimental impact on career progression and thus contribute to the reproduction of racial inequalities in labour market participation.

Section 4: Leadership, resolution and the role of managers and trade union representatives

In this section we consider further barriers and obstacles faced by ethnic minority employees when trying to 'speak out' or challenge racism at work. In doing so, we focus on issues of leadership in relation to the role of managers and trade union representatives.

The role of managers

Business in the Community's (2011) *Race to Progress* report found that 'a lack of support or poor relationships' with managers was one of the main factors limiting career progression among ethnic minority employees.[14]

While many organisations take great pride in their attempts to promote equality and diversity (see Section 6), many of the ethnic minority employees who took part in the 2015 *Race at Work* survey reported encountering organisational and institutional indifference when trying to challenge racism. This was mostly commonly identified as being a problem at the managerial level. What is more, managers were identified as being among those responsible for racist bullying and harassment in the workplace.

> I was described as a "Fuslim" (a fake Muslim) because I "claim to be Muslim but don't wear a hijab". These were the views of a senior manager who openly laughed about it in the office. I generally ignored it in the hope that it would go away…I didn't raise it with my line manager at the time because she was also bullying me and my colleague. Unfortunately, senior management only took action after my colleague experienced a nervous breakdown (and later resigned from the organisation). My line manager was stripped of her line management responsibility as a punishment and was moved to a different team (Other ethnic group, female, public sector)

Many ethnic minority employees also commented that they felt as if they were banging their heads against a 'brick wall' when trying to talk about race and/or challenge racism from managers. In fact, this was a common experience for employees working in a wide variety of industrial sectors.[15]

> Constant harassment and bullying by the line manager in respect of the work undertaken by me and harmful negative feedback/ 'steer' from her manager to her regarding my intellectual ability and competence. I regularly questioned and challenged the baseless and shallow views expressed but I strongly feel that the die had been cast. It was like talking to a brick wall (Pakistani, male, public sector)

Listening to the voices of ethnic minority employees also shines a light on the fact that workplaces often have clear managerial hierarchies predicated along racial lines. To put it another way, most workplaces have a clear 'chain of command', whereby authority and power rests in the hands of a White manager or company executive, most of whom are men. Some ethnic minority employees reported feeling unable to 'speak out' or directly challenge racism because this would mean confronting someone above them in the power structure of the organisation. Not only this, attempts to go higher up the 'chain of command' were also often met with indifference.

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[14] In fact, concern over a lack of managerial support was much lower among ethnic minority employees working in businesses that were run by ethnic minority managers.
[15] For a further discussion of the experience of confronting a 'brick wall', see Ahmed, S. (2012) *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life*. London: Duke University Press.

As all the people involved were more senior than me, I didn't say or do anything about it. It made me uncomfortable working there and was one of the reasons why I left (Any other Asian background, female, 55+ years old)

I was severely bullied by my line manager…I wrote to the executive management to intervene or investigate, but I never got a response, it has been years now (Black African, female, aged 25-34 years old)

As we have shown already, feeling unable to talk about and/ or challenge racism can have an emotional and psychological impact, fostering feelings of powerlessness. While some ethnic minority workers resigned themselves to the belief that racism is an inevitable part of their working life, others felt that they have had no other choice but to seek alternative employment.

The comments provided by ethnic minority employees also revealed that there was much variation in the way that managers handled racism from customers, clients and service users. In some cases, White British respondents provided examples of their managers clearly communicating that racism was unacceptable and would not be tolerated.

Customer racially abused my supervisor when they couldn't get their own way. I banned customer from my store and called the police. He was charged and found guilty (White British, female, retail)

A customer took exception to my colleague's accent and working for a UK company. Our company does not tolerate abusive behaviour from customers and his account was closed (White British, female, financial services)

However, ethnic minority employees suggested that this was not always the case. Managerial indifference towards racism was often underpinned by the notion that 'the customer is always right'. This is particularly prevalent in the retail and service sectors.

When it involves a contractor, my line manager would reply, "Don't interfere with their work!"…When it involves a customer, the line manager would repeat: "The customer is always right!" When it involves a senior manager, my line manager would conclude: "After careful consideration we do not see any evidence of discrimination. We have taken into account what you have said, but on this occasion, your complaint does not amount to discrimination" (Any other Asian background, male, retail)

I saw a colleague being subject to racist language from a customer. Despite witnesses the managers refused to do anything and said it was part of the job (Indian, male, manager/ senior administrator in the public sector)

Some managers responded to racism by transferring the person who had reported witnessing and/or experiencing racism.

Reported it to the management chain. It was poorly dealt with and the person being bullied was transferred (Black Caribbean, male, manager/ senior administrator)

Brought to attention but my manager then had me investigated, for my ability to do the job, and I was transferred not the manager concerned! (Any other White background, female, retail)

A friend of mine when she complained about what is going on in her workplace was transferred from one department to the other. She had been floating for years now and hasn't got a promotion for years (Any other Asian background, female, clerical manager)

These types of response are typical examples of 'becoming the problem'.[16] That is, it is the person who has decided to 'speak out' and/ or challenge racism, rather than racism itself, that is identified as being 'the problem'. Therefore, rather than deal with racism, some managers have found it easier to transfer, 'manage' or 'silence' the person making the complaint.

The role of trade union representatives

As well as reporting racism to their managers and 'human resources', a considerable number of ethnic minority workers also reported experiencing and /or witnessing racism to a trade union representative. Although some ethnic minority workers were critical of their trade union representative's reluctance to address their grievance and/or their effectiveness in doing so, it was more common that ethnic minority workers were positive in regard to the advice, support and action undertaken by trade union representatives. This was most evident in cases where ethnic minority workers experienced managerial indifference or racism at the hands of a manager.

Yes, I got the union involved, now there is no direct bullying by the boss (Pakistani, female, 45-54 years old, professional/ higher technical work)

I and other colleagues went to the union and fought against it after many years. That senior manager is now gone (Black African, female, 45-54 years old)

I experienced it for three years. I constantly reported it to management. The manager at the time ignored everything I reported. I kept a detailed log including emails sent to him almost begging him for help. He would not even move me from the group which were bullying me. After three years, it broke me and I went off with stress for nearly two months and the union helped me get out of the office (Pakistani, female, public sector)

I went to union who organised changes to my work so I have no need for contact with the individual again (Black Caribbean, female, public sector)

It was at the hand of my direct line manager…she set the tone for how the rest of the team felt they could behave and so I was then subject to it from members of the team including junior members…Once I'd worked out it was not just in my head or paranoia I went to speak with my Union Rep who was brilliant and laid out the options I could pursue and who also supported me and gave me coping mechanisms (Any other Black background, female, public sector)

These quotations clearly show that trade union representatives can be an important source of solidarity, while also playing an important role in advising, supporting and helping ethnic minority workers to both cope and challenge racism at work. As the quotations above suggest, this was particularly the case for ethnic minority employees working in the public sector. These statements also raise an important question about whether ethnic minority workers employed in the private sector receive the same levels of support.

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[16] For a further discussion on 'becoming the problem', see Ahmed, S. (2012) *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life*. London: Duke University Press.

Moreover, the importance of managerial leadership is aptly highlighted in the above quotation which points out that managers can 'set the tone for how the rest of the team [feel] they can behave'.

What does 'resolution' mean?

While some ethnic minority workers reported being able to seek different forms of recourse when trying to challenge racism at work, other ethnic minority employees reported that the person who had been racist towards them did not face any form of inquiry or disciplinary procedure. In some cases, it was also reported that the person who had experienced racism had to continue working with the individual that had been racist towards them.

> I went through a grievance procedure; the outcome was that we were not supposed to be in the same team again. When I came back to work (I had been signed off with stress) I was informed that she would no longer be my line manager, but we would be in the same team again (White and Asian, female 45-54 years old, manager/ senior administrator)

In other instances, reports of racism were said to have been 'settled' by the culprit apologising to the person they had been racist towards.

> As a union activist I spoke up and met with the member who was bullied. No further action was taken as the 'bully' apologised almost immediately for being out of line with comments (White British, male, financial services)

> My old line manager was always openly negative about one of my team members so I challenged him about it. He had not realised he was showing a negative attitude to that team member so thanked me for challenging it. He apologised to my colleague and working relationships improved (White British, male, manager in the public sector)

Further research needs to be done in terms of analysing both the role of leadership, grievance procedures and the notion of 'resolution'. In terms of the latter, more work needs to be done to assess how instances of racism are handled and what constitutes an acceptable outcome, especially from the perspective of the person experiencing racism. In terms of 'resolution', it is important to ensure that apologising does not become a mere 'safety valve': that is, a means of avoiding conflict while maintaining the status quo. At the same time grievance procedures must not force the person that has experienced racism to accept an apology. Instead, an act of apology should be part of a broader process that actually addresses the nature and scale of racism in the workplace. This is also particularly important in terms of the addressing the emotional and psychological impacts of racism, principally in terms of addressing both a lack of recognition and the feelings of injustice that emerge when racism is 'swept under the carpet'. It is equally important that employers and managers, in discussion with ethnic minority employees, consider the emotional and psychological impact that continuing to work with the perpetrators of racism has on ethnic minority employees. As some of the quotes presented in this report suggest, many people who experience racism do not want to continue working with the person/people who have been racist towards them.

Summary

If racism in the workplace is to be effectively challenged, it is clear that leadership will play an important role. The 2015 *Race at Work* survey suggests that leadership at the managerial level is all too often found wanting. This was evident in the sheer volume of reports of both racism by managers *and* managerial indifference to racism. For example, 28% of all ethnic

minority workers reported witnessing or experiencing racial harassment or bullying from managers in the last five years. Taken together, both the quantitative and qualitative evidence suggests that this plays a critical part in ethnic minority workers opting not to report racism in their place of employment. In contrast, it was far more common for ethnic minority employees to speak positively of the leadership and support shown by trade union representatives. Although worryingly, the evidence captured by the *Race at Work* survey suggests that this may be somewhat limited to the public sector. The quotations above also provide insights into the different forms of coping mechanisms and outcomes that trade union representatives were able to help negotiate.

The evidence presented in this section also suggests that further critical discussion is required in relation to what 'resolution' actually means and amounts to for people experiencing and witnessing racism. Is it really sufficient for instances of racism to be resolved through an apology? Is it acceptable to expect ethnic minority employees to continue working with the person that has acted in a racist way towards them?

When considering the question of 'resolution' it is also important that responses to racism are not limited to simply assessing each complaint or grievance raised on an individual, case-by-case basis. Instead any such assessment and attempt at resolution must also consider whether individual cases are in fact symptomatic of a broader culture of racism in the workplace; what it was about the workplace that enabled such events to occur. In doing so, employers and employee representatives should also examine whether individual instances of racism contribute to the reproduction of racial inequality at a structural level, particularly in terms of disparities in levels of pay and bonuses, as well as discrimination in recruitment and inequalities in rates of promotion.

Furthermore, concerns regarding legal costs and the lack of confidence in the impartiality of employment tribunals raises further questions relating to a) the resources and sources of support external to the workplace that are available to employees; and b) if external resources and sources of support are already available, how do we ensure that this information is made more readily available to employees.

Section 5: White resentment and reverse racism?

In this section we examine responses given by White survey respondents to open-ended questions relating to the promotion of equality, diversity and fairness, and experiencing and/or witnessing racism at work. In doing so, this section will explore examples of White resentment and claims of reverse racism, placing emphasis on how both might limit equality and diversity work, while also obscuring the nature and severity of racial inequality at work.

The quotations throughout this report demonstrate that many white employees were attentive to the racism faced by their ethnic minority colleagues. Alongside reporting the racism endured by their colleagues, quotations in the following section also show that some white workers do value equality and diversity in the workplace, as well as expressing, to varying degrees, a commitment to a workplace free of racism.

At the same time, the quantitative analysis presented in the 2015 *Race at Work* report found that promoting race equality was more likely to be an objective for ethnic minority workers. Moreover, 42% of White employees felt uncomfortable talking about race at work. This discomfort may be a response to being labelled racist.

> I was accused by a Black member of staff of being racist because I asked him where he had been when out of the office without leave (White British, male, 55+ years old, foreman/ supervisor)

> Accused of being racist myself, which I certainly wasn't being, because I criticised someone who was from South Africa (White British, female, 45-54 years old, education)

> Manager sent aggressive emails and when I spoke to her about them she asked if I had a problem with her colour. If I had asked if she had a problem with me being White I would have been accused of racism and I found her question very offensive as I have never showed any prejudice towards her (White British, female, 35-44 years old)

White employees gave a wide range of responses to being asked what their employer/ organisation did to promote equality, diversity and fairness. While some listed a series of activities and training programmes (see Section 6), others suggested that their organisation/ workplace was 'diverse' and 'fair'. Moreover, White British employees also made statements such as equality and diversity 'is embedded in the ethos of the company' (White British, female, 35-44 years old, education).

Some White employees also suggested that there was no need for their employer to promote equality, diversity and fairness.

> I work with people from over 30 nationalities and many Faiths. There is no 'official action' as we go to the pub together including the Muslim women...I have never in 7 years seen any need for 'official' awareness training as no issues actually exist although there is someone whose duties include 'training' but they concentrate on new arrivals (White British, male, 45-54 years old, retail)

One of the problems with claims to equality, diversity and fairness is that they invoke positive feelings of pride, and at the same time can also conceal the fact that racism often operates alongside, or in spite of, equality and diversity policies and activities. Whereas some White employees took pride in the diversity of their company, other White employees demonstrated what has been referred to as 'White resentment'. This was most evident in responses to being asked what their employers did to promote equality and diversity:

Ramming it down our throats at every opportunity (White British, female, 55+ years old, legal)

Making us do pointless online training and lecturing us INCESSANTLY (White British, male, 55+ years old, education)

Talking crap and alienating everyone (White British, female, 55+ years old)

Talk complete and utter Marxist rubbish. About time the White British people are treated fairly in our own Country! (White British, male, sales/ services)

Diversity is code for White genocide (White British, male, 35-44 years old, financial services)

The nature of White resentment is further revealed by the longer, more extended comments provided by White workers.

During a recruitment campaign a colleague and I were seriously "leant on" to select a Black female candidate, even though she was not the best candidate. The process was meant to be fair and transparent and only the best candidate should be selected regardless of race or gender. This, so called "positive discrimination", is unfair (White British, male, public sector procurement)

As we demonstrated in Section 2, a number of ethnic minority employees felt that when it comes to job performance and competence, they were subjected to unfair levels of scrutiny. The above quotation is a prime example of the way in which the appointment of ethnic minority employees was often considered to be the result of equality and diversity policies that supposedly give ethnic minority employees an 'unfair advantage' and/ or 'preferential treatment'. It was also suggested that ethnic minority employees were recruited/ appointed as a result of the employer being obliged to fill an 'ethnic quota'.

Some line managers have been recruiting from minorities in their goals and appraisals for the year. I have had conversations with Human Resources who actively seek "Asian female talent" and are not interested in helping me. There are multiple clubs promoting minorities…This is all good. However, a very strong feeling of unfairness in recruitment still exists and this too "in your face" discriminatory policy when it comes to recruiting makes it a non-level playing field for those not in a minority. Lots of resentment is brewing in the organisation at working level and questioning the authenticity of the organisation and managers not picking the best candidate but meeting their "quota" for the year to gain their bonus. It also makes people question if someone is there on merit or because of a policy. It should not be like this, it should be fair and equal. Then there is no doubt and respect comes…However, this way of "forcing" the issue to where it is skewed just makes a mockery of it, and devalues the whole process and forces resentment under the surface. There has to be a more balanced and better way (White British, male, information technology)

Not only do such views contribute to ethnic minority employees feeling devalued at work, they also tend to feed into and reinforce claims of 'reverse racism' – a claim whereby members of the dominant majority racial group is said to be the victim of racism.

The quantitative analysis presented in the 2015 *Race at Work* report highlighted that White employees reported experiencing racial harassment and bullying from their managers, colleagues and from clients, customers and service users. This was also evident in White employees' responses to questions about experiencing and/ or witnessing racism in the workplace.

I am a White woman and have been called a White bitch by other races many times (White British, female, financial services)

Several years ago, I was briefly line managed by a Muslim, who whenever the British Government undertook something he disapproved of, used to criticise White members of his team, including myself. Usually it was criticism of how we looked, what we ate, a deep resentment of Christianity (even though I doubt any of us were churchgoers). Managers were aware, but were afraid to do anything because they feared (no doubt rightly) that they in any way criticised the Muslim manager, he would immediately accuse them of racism and as a result, White members of the team had to find other jobs (White British, male, public sector)

Whilst the organisation talks about diversity a lot there is very little senior management based assistance – instead it is passed to [Equality and Diversity] Champions at a local area level...However due to favouritism the wrong person has been chosen. All they do is promote Muslim equality because they themselves are Muslim (and it's therefore easier for them). However no other minority religions get a look in. I say this as a Christian who works in a branch of Muslim, Hindu and Sikh employees – all of us (including the Muslims) feel that our diversity is too focussed on the Islamic faith (White British, male, public sector)

The third quotation here is yet further evidence of the way that there is often an attempt to legitimise claims of 'reverse racism' and White resentment by stating that ethnic minority people agree with the claim being made.

In comparison to ethnic minority workers, some White British workers also suggested that they had experienced racism at the hands of a trade union representative.

My line manager in a previous job constantly criticised what I did, she criticised how I dealt with customers even though the customers always said I was "helpful", "polite" and "courteous"…I applied for another job in the same department. As she was a union rep I didn't see the point in reporting her for bullying (White British, female, finance/ clerical)

White British workers also suggested that the relationship between managers and trade union representatives discouraged them from reporting racism.

I was treated unfairly by my manager. I did not do anything about it because the union are in the manager's pockets here. I just got another job within the same company (White British, female, private sector)

White male employees also suggested that attempts to promote equality, diversity and fairness disadvantaged White heterosexual men.

No idea. They pay lip service to equality, diversity and fairness. In my organisation, you do best if you are any or some of these: female, young, not of UK White ethnicity, LGBT. Old White men like me are not rated. This is the civil service, by the way (White British, male, 55+ years old, Civil Service)

They practice discrimination against White British males. That is the UK Civil Service for you (White British, male, 35-44 years old, Civil Service)

These responses highlight the way in which White resentment can also be expressed in gendered ways. Bearing in mind that racism and sexism are often inter-dependent, if not inseparable, these quotations are evidence of the way in which some White male employees

have perceived the promotion of equality, diversity and fairness as being a threat to Whiteness, masculinity and heteronormativity.

Overall, the prevalence of comments alleging 'reverse racism' raises an important issue. Has the promotion of equality, diversity and fairness contributed to a 'culture of moral equivalence'[17] in the workplace? That is, do White employees use notions of 'equality' and 'fairness' to suggest that racism 'cuts both ways'?

There is little, if indeed any, evidence which supports sweeping generalisations that organisations and institutions such as the Civil Service 'practice discrimination against White British males'. Moreover, while the alleged racial interactions, which have reported as a form prejudice and discrimination against White British workers, may be unpleasant and upsetting, they do not contribute to the reproduction of structures of racial inequality. To suggest that they do would limit our understanding of racism and would fail to pay adequate attention to the historical basis of racism and its power to organise society in ways that structurally disadvantage some ethnic groups but not others. In short, claims of 'reverse racism' and suggestions that racism 'cuts both ways' obscures the nature of racism and the impact that it has on the reproduction of racial inequality.

White employees also appear to feel more confident in terms of 'speaking out', 'stepping in' and 'dealing with' racism (see Section 4). This stands in stark contrast to ethnic minority workers who often felt unable to report and challenge racism (see Section 3). It could be argued that the emergence of a 'culture of moral equivalence' in the workplace has facilitated, and perhaps legitimised, accusations of reverse racism.

Summary

In this section, we have highlighted the different ways in which some White employees responded to being asked about their employers' attempts to promote equality, diversity and fairness. We have also drawn attention to how some White workers responded to questions about experiencing and/or witnessing racism.

In doing so, we have shed light on the way in which some White employees feel that their workplace is 'diverse' and 'fair', thus leading them to suggest that their employer has no need to promote equality, diversity and fairness. This suggests that the anxiety and apprehension that some White workers feel when it comes to talking about race is often more than just a fear of being labelled racist. To put it another way, the discomfort and unease reported by White employees is often underpinned by resentment and allegations of 'reverse racism' and are indicative of the fact that White employees rarely, if at all, have to acknowledge, recognise and confront the nature of racism and racial inequality at work, never mind have their perceptions challenged.

The prevalence of White resentment and claims of reverse racism should not be used to suggest that aims and objectives of equality and diversity work should be revised nor should it be used to justify reformulating the work of equality and diversity practitioners in order to appease the unease and discomfort expressed by White employees. To do so, would validate the notion that equality and diversity work is 'the problem', rather than racial inequality and racist discrimination, harassment and bullying. Instead, attention should be focused on the nature of racism and racial inequality in Britain, why the Race Relations Act was amended in 1968 to outlaw discrimination in employment, and why such legislation, alongside equality duties, are still very much required today. This should take place within a

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[17] Song, M. (2014) 'Challenging a culture of racial equivalence', *British Journal of Sociology*, Volume 65, pp. 107-129.

broader inclusive discussion of Britain's multiracial history, placing emphasis on the history of racism in this country – both of which are all too often ignored, if not 'Whitewashed'. In accordance, with the 2016 report of the [United Nation's Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination](), this discussion should also 'contain a balanced account of the history of the British Empire and colonialism, including slavery and other grave human rights violations', with emphasis placed on how this informs the expression and experience of racism today.

Section 6: Promoting equality, diversity and fairness

Following the introduction of the Race Relations Act (2000), public bodies were required by law to promote race equality and to have in place both a race equality policy and a strategy for achieving policy objectives (see also the Equality Act 2010). This section provides an overview of the responses survey participants gave when asked what their employer does to promote equality, diversity and fairness. The discussion below also highlights some of the criticisms ethnic minority workers made in relation to both their employers attempts to promote equality, diversity and fairness and the role of equality and diversity practitioners.

Promoting equality, diversity and fairness

Many employers promote and achieve equality, diversity and fairness in a number of different ways. In many cases this included at least one or more of the following:

- Anonymous/ 'blind' job applications;
- Induction and/ or (bi-)annual equality and diversity training and 'diversity days';
- Implicit attitudes and unconscious bias training;
- Equality and diversity reports, audits, assessment and reviews, including staff surveys and anonymous feedback forms;
- Setting equality and diversity targets;
- Bullying and harassment workshops;
- Cultural events celebrating religious festivals such as Passover and Ramadan, as well as events such as 'world food day';
- Black History Month;
- Career development and progression training and events;
- Targeted recruitment and mentoring programmes;
- Seminars, lectures and talks;
- Poster campaigns and publicity material on staff notice boards;
- Webinars and communications via blogs, emails, newsletters and circulars;
- Creating and sponsoring Black and Minority Ethnic Networks, working groups, focus groups, listening groups and 'drop-in sessions';
- Including equality and diversity practitioners and trade union representatives as part of recruitment, staff and managerial committees;
- Monthly awards for promoting equality, diversity and fairness and/ or challenging racism at work.

In some cases, equality, diversity and fairness were promoted on a regular basis. In fact, some employees commented that their employer promoted these values through an extensive range of activities.

Establish what we mean by these and similar terms. Ensure we comply with the relevant laws. Monitor levels of representation in our workplace and applicants. Plan actions to encourage applicants from sectors we seek to enlarge. Arbitrate on any matters where staff feel unfairly treated. Make people aware of our values, what is not acceptable language or behaviour. We seek to be fair and value all employees whilst recognising this does NOT mean we are all the same (White British, male, 18-24 years old)

Regular updates/articles in e-newsletters, information about changes to policy and practice, training opportunities (White British, female, 45-54 years old, education)

While this should be welcomed, Section's 3 and 4 have already shown that equality and diversity work often takes place in workplaces and organisations that are indifferent, if not resistant, to the realisation of equality, diversity and fairness.

It is also important that we recognise the invaluable work that equality and diversity practitioners undertake. For example, equality and diversity practitioners often provide 'safe spaces' and crucial support to people who have experienced racism, including racist bullying, harassment and violence. By setting up the groups and networks mentioned above, equality and diversity practitioners can create important forums of support and solidarity.

> As part of a Race Network, we help and support colleagues undergoing this treatment [racist bullying and harassment]. Mainly support, as very difficult to get anything changed (Other ethnic group, female, public sector)

Some employees also suggested that policy documents and promotional activities serve as evidence that their workplaces/ organisations are equal, diverse and that their employer is performing well in this area.

> Mandatory training for all staff. We have a number of Black people in senior positions (Human Resources, social workers etc.). All staff are treated fairly - openly gay, varying religions etc. It's a FANTASTIC organisation to work for, as it actually DOES what it says it does. I previously worked for the Local Authority in education and despite it paying lip service, none of the above applied in reality (White British, male, 35-44 years old, sales/ services)

> The whole organisation promotes these things … equality, diversity and fairness is the backbone of everything we do (White and Black Caribbean, female, 35-44 years old)

> Recruitment process includes fair recruitment policy with no discrimination. No Employee is discriminated. Line Managers are given special training and testing to continually assess fairness at all levels (Indian, male, 25-34 years old, retail)[18]

> All employees are able to apply for roles for which they possess the required skills, experience, ability or attitude. There is no favouritism or discrimination (White British, female, 55+ years old, financial services)

While some employers sought to promote equality, diversity and fairness on a regular basis, often through an extensive range of activities, not all employers pursued these values with the same level of commitment. Less than 50% of employees had been offered equality, diversity and fairness training. A closer examination of the qualitative responses offered by employees reveals that such forms of training were often promoted 'only occasionally', 'infrequently' and 'when the need arises'. For some employees, the promotion of equality, diversity and fairness did not extend far beyond drafting policy documents, the recruitment process and employee induction training. In one case, an employee working in the public sector commented that his employer was only just 'beginning to think about it'. What is more, it was not uncommon to hear employees comment that they were 'unsure', had 'no idea' or 'don't know' what their employers did to promote these values.

A large number of employees were critical of their employer's attempts to promote equality, diversity and fairness. More specifically, many employees referred to their employer's attempts to promote these values as being 'symbolic', 'tokenistic' and 'ineffective', if not a 'box ticking exercise'.

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[18] For a further discussion of racism and the recruitment process, see *Race and Recruitment: Exposing the Barriers*. Business in the Community (2012).

They just pay lip service to tick the equality box (Black African, female, 45-54 years old)

Paying lip service to a legal requirement (White British, male, 55+ years old, financial services)

It's a tick box exercise for a government department to show that they value equality when in fact they do not (White British, female, 35-44 years old)

Not fairness but diversity. It is tokenistic and superficial. When equality is a problem they get rid of the person and not the problem (Any other White background, female, public sector)

Say all the right things, but it's tokenistic as there is reduced transparency in my organisation within the senior management team and they have removed the mechanisms that have traditionally held them accountable (Black African, female, public sector)

Take the lead to promote employee group forums...in my view just tokenistic gestures hardly resulting in any meaningful change especially in relation to race equality (Indian, female, public sector)

I am sure they chair lots of meetings and gather lots of data regarding equality and diversity. They will also no doubt co-ordinate the creation of suitable policy statements and procedures which then have little or no effect on the day to day activities of anyone who works in the organisation (White British, male, 55+ years old, professional or higher technical work)

They say the right things on the right occasions. Whether they believe it or not is another question. I will believe it when I see someone who is not White, male and Oxbridge educated as head of my organisation (Black Caribbean, female, 35-44 years old, marketing)

Criticisms of equality and diversity practitioners

Equality and diversity practitioners play an important role in both promoting and attempting to achieve equality, diversity and fairness in the workplace. However, when undertaking these roles, equality and diversity representatives often face quite considerable barriers and obstacles which hinder their attempts to carry out the activities listed above. At the same time, the responses provided by ethnic minority workers in the *Race at Work* survey suggests that there is also a need to reflect on the criticisms that ethnic minority employees have made in relation to equality and diversity officers. For example, it was suggested that the person undertaking the role of equality and diversity officer was not suitable for this task because they had either little understanding of, or did not pay adequate attention to, racial equality. In fact, the current tendency to place race, gender, sexuality and disability alongside one another as part of a broader, more general approach to equality and diversity issues was criticised by some ethnic minority employees who felt that equality and diversity work benefitted some groups more than others.

There is a huge gulf of disconnect between the people responsible for equality, diversity and fairness and the staff who are subject to injustice and inequality. They also seem to have no knowledge of what injustice and inequality looks like in their organisation, neither do they seem to care (Black Caribbean, female, manager in the public sector)

We had a year dedicated to looking at equality in the workplace and work to take forward some of the outputs from that in subsequent years. In reality this means gender (READ: White women) and a splash of disability (Black Caribbean, female, public sector)

It is one of their corporate objectives so there is an obligation to have it but there is no evidence of what they do. Those supposedly promoting equality are the very ones to promote the norms by which they benefit. The women in these roles are all about promoting opportunities for White women and any supposed positive action is always at the exclusion of black minority staff. This is evidenced in the recently introduced performance management system which disproportionately adversely affects black minority staff and has been used to manage a large number out of the organisation (Any other Black background, female, public sector)

These quotations touch on some of the issues raised in Business in the Community's (2012) *Leadership and Cultural Identity* report which found that

White women leaders did not see racial or ethnic identity playing any role in the notion of leadership, nor was any reference made to the need to understand other people's culture as part of being an effective leader.

In presenting this evidence, it is not our intention to suggest that race, gender, sexuality and disability should be separated from one another, but rather to highlight the need to ensure that satisfactory attention is paid to race and racism, which includes paying the required attention to the way that racism, sexism, homophobia and disabilism can be expressed and experienced in inter-dependent ways.

Summary

The evidence presented in this section reveals the range of different (and often multiple) ways employees reported that their employer has promoted equality, diversity and fairness. At the same time, the *Race at Work* survey paints a much varied, if not inconsistent picture, of how these values are promoted in workplaces across Britain, with some workers suggesting that their employer has made little or no attempt to do so.

The quotations above are also indicative of the way in which both ethnic minority and White British employees were sceptical about their employers' commitment to bringing about any real sense of substantive change in terms of addressing racial inequality. To put it another way: many ethnic minority employees felt that there was an awful lot of talk and not enough action. This was particularly the case for those employees who reported that racism was a recurring, if not daily, feature of their working lives.

Relatedly, it remains unclear whether the various activities and training programmes outlined above include a discussion that explains why legislation was introduced to outlaw discrimination in employment and why subsequent equality and diversity duties were introduced. It was also uncertain whether racism and the role that it plays in producing racial inequality were part of equality, diversity and fairness activities and training.

Many equality and diversity practitioners do important, critical work, particularly in terms of creating 'safe spaces' and networks of support and solidarity. At the same, it is equally important that we listen to the criticisms ethnic minority employees made in relation to equality and diversity workers. In this regard, many felt that equality and diversity workers did not pay adequate attention to, or had a limited understanding of the nature and scale of, racism and racial inequality, as well as commenting that the promotion of equality and diversity benefitted some groups more than others.

In the following section, we consider some of the broader and more general criticisms that have been made in relation to existing approaches to equality and diversity work.

Section 7: Limitations of existing approaches to equality and diversity

The discussion so far has shown that equality, diversity and fairness is promoted in a variety of ways and to different degrees, if indeed it is promoted at all. The previous section highlighted that some ethnic minority workers felt that their employer's attempts to promote equality, diversity and fairness were 'symbolic', 'tokenistic' and 'ineffective', if not a 'box ticking exercise'. We also noted concern that equality and diversity practitioners had either little understanding of, or did not pay adequate attention to, racial equality. In light of these findings, it is imperative that we examine some of the broader limitations of existing approaches to equality and diversity.

Equality and diversity documents and training

If employers are serious about achieving equality, diversity and fairness, the persistence of racism and racial inequality should lead to them to think critically about how the aims and objectives contained in equality and diversity policy documents are put into action, if indeed they are at all. It is equally important to consider the potential limitations of policy documents, action plans, activities and training programmes. This includes examining whether there is a gap between what such documents say, what employers actually do, and any restrictions placed on equality and diversity practitioners.

Race equality policy documents are often used by employers as expressions of commitment, indicators of 'good performance' and as evidence that diversity has been achieved.[19] A sign of an employer's commitment can be found in how employers and equality and diversity practitioners talk about these issues. For example, if employers talk about equality and diversity only in the context of compliance with law, this may be read as a sign of a weak commitment to these values, thus reinforcing the view that the promotion of equality and diversity has become a 'box ticking exercise'.

Documents expressing a commitment to equality, diversity and fairness can also conceal the lack of equality and diversity within an organisation. They can also obscure an employer's indifference, if not unwillingness, to address these issues, and thus contribute to the maintenance of racism, exclusion and inequality.[20]

Similarly, ensuring that all staff receive equality and diversity training, and that this training is mandatory, can in fact be somewhat limited in terms of what this achieves.[21] To be more specific, training and promotional activities should not be interpreted as a statement of fact that an employer is 'doing well', nor should they be interpreted as evidence that equality and diversity has been achieved.

In light of evidence provided by the *Race at Work* survey, it is also important that diversity and equality are not simply lumped together as being one and the same thing. While the demographic composition of a company or workplace may be diverse, this does not necessarily mean that racism and racial inequality are not a problem. Therefore, it is vital that recognising and taking pride in the diversity of a company's workforce, does not distract employers from exploring whether racism and racial inequality is a problem and, where necessary, taking appropriate action.

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[19] Ahmed, S. (2007) 'You end up doing the document rather than doing the doing': Diversity, race equality and the politics of Documentation', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Volume 30, Issue 4, p.590.
[20] Ibid., p.595.
[21] Ibid., p. 595.

It is our view that there is a need to seriously examine the extent to which the self-perception and organisational pride that can be found in statements expressing both a commitment to equality and diversity and opposition to racism are in fact barriers to recognising the nature and extent of racism at work, thus limiting the resources, space and possibilities for equality and diversity workers to challenge racism.

Equality and diversity audits

It has been shown that equality and diversity workers in higher education institutions have mixed feelings about equality audits.[22] On the one hand, some feel that these activities can be used to compel employers to take action to address racism and inequality. At the same time, others feel that such assessments have limited efficacy in terms of achieving real, substantive changes in the workplace.

It is also important that employers examine what such assessments actually measure. Are they measuring the demographic composition of a workplace or are they measuring equality of representation across all levels of the workplace structure? Do such audits and reviews take account of the nature and extent of racism in the workplace? And do they assess whether employees are satisfied with the way that racism is handled by their employer?

Implicit attitude testing and unconscious bias training

In recent times, implicit attitude testing and unconscious bias training have become increasingly popular among employers. However, it is important to take stock of some of the criticisms that have been made of these methods.

Focussing solely on implicit attitude testing and unconscious bias training as a response to racism and racial inequality individualises a problem that is structural and systemic in nature. Some critics have argued that rather than addressing racism and racial inequality at work, such forms of training can actually teach people what they can and cannot say, thus providing a set of guidelines as to what constitutes 'acceptable' and 'unacceptable' forms of race talk and behaviours. As we demonstrated in Section 2, many ethnic minority employees noted that they were treated differently by their White counterparts, including managers, and that in some cases it was difficult for them to demonstrate that such treatment was the result of racism. This raises two important questions:

(1) Does implicit attitude testing and unconscious bias training, actually change the language and culture of the workplace, or does it change the manner in which racism is expressed and experienced?

(2) Is one of the unintended consequences of the aforementioned forms of training and testing that the expression of racism is becoming more covert?

Another criticism of implicit attitude testing and unconscious bias training is that they have legitimised the 'acceptability' of unconscious bias, rather than racism as an explanation for racial inequality in recruitment and career progression. Not only this, it has also been suggested that racial inequality can be eliminated if we are made aware of implicit attitudes and unconscious biases. Again, this would only serve to individualise a problem that is both structural and systematic in nature. In light of this, it is important that we ensure that implicit attitude testing and unconscious bias training do not reduce racism to a set of attitudes or

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[22] Ibid., p.596.

thought processes. A consequence of doing so would be to obscure the nature of racism as a system of structures, institutions and relations with the power to discriminate and produce racial inequality.

Finally, while implicit attitude testing and unconscious bias training (or equality and diversity) training may lead to a change in how ethnic minority workers are treated at work, these activities do not offer a guarantee that any change in attitudes and behaviours will be long term.

Summary

While some employees were keen to emphasise that progress has been made and that much has changed, it is equally, if not more, important to continue to highlight what has not changed, what has remained the same and what still needs to be done. The continued prevalence of racism and racial inequality should lead employers to adopt a critical approach to the range of activities and training programmes that they employ to promote equality, diversity and fairness. By listening to the voices of ethnic minority employees we gain critical insights into just how far away we are from achieving equality, diversity and fairness at work. Moreover, it can be argued that having an equality and diversity policy and by putting promotional activities in place, does not necessarily mean being good at race equality. Nor should they be used to suggest that racism has been overcome. This can only be judged by the realisation of equality, by listening to the voices of those who experience and witness racism, and by examining whether those who have experienced and/ or witnessed racism feel that the matter has been addressed in a satisfactory manner. The 2015 *Race at Work* survey clearly suggests that this is far from being the case.

Section 8: Where do we go from here? Further recommendations

In August 2016, the United Nation's Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination published its 'Concluding observations on the twenty-first to twenty-third periodic reports of United Kingdom'.

In reference to racism and racial inequality in the field of employment, the Committee recommended that the Government collect 'disaggregated data on employment, unemployment and activity rates of individuals from ethnic minority groups'. In addition to this it was also recommended that the Government should adopt and implement 'targeted measures to address unemployment, occupational segregation and discriminatory practices in recruitment, salaries, promotion and other employment conditions'. The Committee also made the following recommendations in reference to the field of education, which we feel are equally applicable to the field of employment, particularly in terms of using training and activities promoting equality and diversity to deepen our collective understanding of both the historical and international political contexts that shape the expression and experience of racism today:

(a) Ensure that schools comply with their public sector equality duty under the Equality Act 2010 and Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 to challenge racist bullying and to promote respect for diversity, including through the training of educational personnel;

(b) Ensure that the school curricula across its jurisdiction contain a balanced account of the history of the British Empire and colonialism, including slavery and other grave human rights violations.

In light of these recommendations and the evidence presented in this report we offer the following recommendations outlined below which build upon on those published in the 2015 *Race at Work* report (See Appendix Two).

As the recommendations below make clear, leadership and accountability are pivotal if racism and racial inequality in the workplace are to be addressed and real, meaningful and substantive change is to be achieved. By this we mean addressing the nature of racism in a more holistic way that places individual cases of racism in a broader discussion and understanding of the entrenched nature of racial inequality in labour market participation and institutional racism (including the casual racism which is all too often an embedded feature of workplace culture). Rather than simply looking at racism and racial inequality under the heading of equality and diversity work, government ministers and officials must be made accountable for bringing about such change. Similarly, managing directors and senior managers have a responsibility to provide leadership in this area. During the recent Conservative Party Leadership election, Theresa May pledged that 'If I'm prime minister…we're going to have not just consumers represented on company boards, but workers as well'. In light of the evidence presented in this report, we urge the Prime Minister to make good on that pledge so that ethnic minority workers have both oversight and input into equality and diversity practice. Therefore, equality and diversity work and addressing racism and racial inequality must become central to organisational change, all the way from the boardroom to the shop floor.

For Government

(1) Demonstrate a commitment to eliminating racial inequality in the labour market by setting-up an annual review which measures progress in this area. This should include setting up inspections of companies and organisations where racism has been identified as an engrained and persistent feature of workplace culture, as well as investigating racial inequality in relation to pay, bonuses and levels and rates of recruitment and promotion.

(2) Institute new legislation regarding the procurement of government and public sector contracts to ensure that all tenders are subject to an Equality Impact Assessment. This assessment should examine whether companies: a) have an accessible and transparent equality and diversity policy and accompanying training activities; b) unequivocally express and demonstrate that a zero-tolerance approach to racism is adopted; c) clear evidence of carrying out readily available audit assessments in line with the recommendations for employers set out below (see Recommendation 7 for employers); and d) have a plan of action and timeframe for achieving equality and diversity targets upon which progress can be measured and subsequent tenders can be assessed. This legislation should also ensure that the results of employer audit assessments are made publicly available.

(3) Commission further research and commit to a wide-ranging review into whether employers are fulfilling their equality duties and how employers respond to instances of racism in the workplace. Both of these should focus on identifying additional support structures for employees, particularly where they feel unable to report racism in the workplace. This might include providing additional support such as counselling and representation. This research should also focus on whether there is a gap between what equality and diversity documents say they do, what employers actually do and the restrictions placed on equality and diversity practitioners.

(4) The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) should be given an adequate level of 'ring-fenced' funding that will enable the EHRC to ensure that employers comply with existing legislation and equality duties. The EHRC should also be given further power to apply sanctions in cases of non-compliance, particularly in cases of systemic non-compliance.

(5) Eliminate the financial legal costs faced by employees seeking to challenge racism through employment tribunals, as well as ensuring that tribunal committees are diverse.

(6) In light of the evidence presented in Section 2, and the recent announcement that there is to be an audit exploring 'racial disparities in public service outcomes', we strongly recommend that the Government reviews the implementation of the 'Draft code of practice on the English language requirement for public sector workers'. We recommend that the government should hold further consultation on how the issue of language proficiency contributes to how racism is experienced at work, particularly in the public sector.

(7) Introduce legislative provisions in relation to the issue of language proficiency, giving employees the legal right to have their 'language proficiency' assessed free of charge by an independent expert and to ensure that if necessary employees are given the opportunity to receive additional learning support. Furthermore, it should be independent 'language proficiency' experts, rather than managers, that should determine the level of 'language proficiency' required for particular roles.

For Employers

(1) Ensure that a senior figure within the organisation, who is either trained or demonstrates a requisite level of experience or understanding, is made responsible for ensuring that the company has an anti-racism, equality and diversity policy in place and that this policy is shared with all staff, external stakeholders, contractors, clients and customers. Senior leaders within the organisation/ workplace should also deliver a regular, clear, unequivocal statement indicating that a zero-tolerance approach to racism will be adopted. Such statements should also clearly dispel both the notion that the 'customer is always right' and the disavowal of casual racism that persists in general workplace culture, particularly the forms racism that are repudiated as 'jokes' or as a form of 'friendly banter'. Procurement agreements with clients and external contractors should also include a commitment to opposing racism and treating staff with dignity and respect.

(2) Ensure that senior leadership figures sign a policy agreement that guarantees equality and diversity practitioners have the time, space and resources required to fulfil their role, particularly in terms of having time to investigate and respond to reports of racism. This agreement should also ensure that the role of equality and diversity practitioners is not limited to providing induction training and drafting policy documents.

(3) Ensure that equality and diversity training is made mandatory for all managerial staff, with managers who have not undertaken such training doing so at the earliest opportunity.

(4) Ensure that senior managerial figures and all employees in leadership positions are clear about their organisation's policies on racism, equality and diversity and acknowledge their responsibility to ensure that these policies are put into practice at all times. Moreover, fear of victimisation is one of the main reasons people do not report experiencing and/or witnessing racism at work. We suggest that employers consider appointing a senior ethnic minority figure in the organisation to represent more junior employees that experience/witness racial harassment and bullying in order to prevent 'speaking out' against racism having a career limiting impact.

(5) Ensure that senior organisational leaders and Human Resources staff work in a constructive, collaborative and transparent manner with trade unions, employee network groups and diversity and inclusion specialists.

(6) Devise a clear set of equality targets aimed at eliminating levels of racial harassment and bullying incidents and complaints. This should include a timeframe and action plan for achieving these targets, with a senior figure at board level being given responsibility for ensuring that these targets are achieved. This should also include heads of units being made accountable through the provision of clear performance indicators. Employee survey results should also be used as a key performance indicator. Ensuring that the company and local workplaces are representative of the workforce should also be a key performance indicator.

(7) Ensure that equality and diversity audits/ assessments do not simply focus on measuring the demographic composition of the workforce, but also examine whether there is structural inequality in terms of pay, bonuses and levels and rates of recruitment and promotion. Equality and diversity audits should also include information on reports of racism and the nature of racial inequality in the workplace/ organisation. They should also include input from employees, particularly in terms of

recording employee satisfaction levels in relation to equality and diversity training/ activities, employee engagement with line managers, experiences with clients and customers and how employers respond to racism in the workplace, as well as giving employees an opportunity to provide suggestions for improvements in these areas.

(8) Establish structures, roles and processes that unequivocally communicate that all reports of racism will be taken seriously and will be handled in a sensitive and timely manner. Employers should ensure that channels for reporting racism are made accessible, straightforward and transparent and that employees are informed of decisions and action taken. Where existing government legislation permits, employers should also develop ways of responding to racism that centre on the experience and outcomes from the point of view of the person/people who have been subjected to racism. In this regard, employers *should not* transfer the person(s) who have experienced racism unless they have made such a request to do so. Similarly, employees who have experienced racism *should not* be forced to continue working with the person/ people who has been racist towards them.

(9) Establish and sponsor ethnic minority employee networks which create 'safe spaces' and offer support to people who have experienced racism, as well as enabling such a network to allow employees to collectively address the nature of racism and racial inequality in the organisation and across different work sites.

(10) Ensure that training and the promotion of equality and diversity includes a discussion of the continued persistence of racism and racial inequality in the labour market, why the Race Relations Act was amended in 1968 to outlaw discrimination in employment, and why such legislation and equality duties are required today. This should take place within a broader inclusive discussion of Britain's multiracial history, with emphasis placed on the history of racism in this country. In accordance, with the 2016 report of the [United Nation's Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination](#), this discussion should also 'contain a balanced account of the history of the British Empire and colonialism, including slavery and other grave human rights violations', with emphasis placed on how this informs the expression and experience of racism today.

(11) Employee training should also make a clear distinction between racism and prejudice, rather than succumbing to the challenge presented by White resentment and claims of 'reverse racism'. The prevalence of White resentment and claims of reverse racism should not be used to suggest that the aims and objectives of equality and diversity documents should be revised nor should they be used to justify reformulating the work of equality and diversity practitioners in order to address the unease and discomfort expressed by White employees. To do so, would validate the notion that equality and diversity work is 'the problem', rather than racial inequality and racial discrimination, harassment and bullying. Employers should also make a clear statement that any form of prejudice, including forms of prejudice and discrimination between ethnic minority groups, will not be tolerated.

Appendix One - Ethnic Identity and Religious Affiliation Questions & Categories

Question: Ethnicity - To which of these groups do you consider you belong?

WHITE

- (1)   White British
- (2)   Gypsy or Irish Traveller
- (3)   Any other White background

MIXED

- (4)   White and Black Caribbean
- (5)   White and Black African
- (6)   White and Asian
- (7)   Any other mixed background

ASIAN or ASIAN BRITISH

- (8)   Indian
- (9)   Pakistani
- (10) Bangladeshi
- (11) Chinese
- (12) Any other Asian background

BLACK OR BLACK BRITISH

- (13) Black African
- (14) Black Caribbean
- (15) Any other black background

OTHER ETHNIC GROUP

- (16) Arab
- (17) Other ethnic group
- (18) Prefer not to say

Question: Religious affiliation - Do you regard yourself as belonging to any particular religion, and if so, to which of these do you belong?

(1)   No, I do not regard myself as belonging to any particular religion

(2)   Church of England/Anglican/Episcopal

(3)   Roman Catholic

(4)   Presbyterian/Church of Scotland

(5)   Methodist

(6)   Baptist

(7)   Orthodox Christian

(8)   Pentecostal (e.g. Assemblies of God, Elim Pentecostal Church, New Testament Church of God, Redeemed Christian Church of God)

(9)   Evangelical – independent/non-denominational (e.g. FIEC, Pioneer, Vineyard, Newfrontiers)

(10)   Judaism

(11)   Hinduism

(12)   Islam

(13)   Sikhism

(14)   Buddhism

(15)   Other

(16)   Prefer not to say

Appendix Two - *Race at Work (2015)* report recommendations for government and employers

Below are the recommendations for government and employers as listed in the 2015 *Race at Work report*.

For Government

Immediate action:

- Support the Financial Reporting Council during its 2016 consultation of the UK Corporate Governance Code to add "and race" to its definition of diversity in the four provisions where the Code recommends boards pay heed to "its diversity, including gender".

- Use its procurement spending power to ensure that businesses that tender for public contracts can demonstrate a commitment to race diversity, with evidence of their policies and action in the recruitment, progression and retention of ethnic minority people and preventing racial harassment and bullying in the workplace. This was successfully done with Olympic 2012 contracts and can now be embedded into the way business is done with government contracts in the UK. Medium term action:

- Draw up a policy framework on race that includes a strong recruitment agenda to close the unemployment gap which has stubbornly persisted for many years. The framework should have a focus on leadership, increasing transparent career progression ladders, and role models in order to encourage the promotion of good practice. The government could also consider adapting the approach taken by the Women's Business Council and using those principles to establish a Race and Ethnicity Business Council.

- Consider an overview of all of the governments various BME 2020 targets to ensure that specific targets are stretching, deliver progress and are relevant to the context they are operating in. This will ensure that momentum is sustained over the next five years.

Longer term action:

- Consider commissioning a wide-ranging review of race equality in the workplace, particularly on access to promotions at senior management levels. The decision to appoint Lord Davies of Abersoch to identify the barriers preventing more women reaching the boardroom has led to a step change in attitude and behaviour. There is no reason why a similar intervention on racial equality will not produce results within the FTSE 100 board rooms and executive teams.

For Employers

(1) Increase access to work experience. There is overwhelming acknowledgement that work experience is critical for gaining access into the workplace. Employers need to ensure they are giving equal access to work experience opportunities to young people from Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) backgrounds, and consider other ways of engaging with potential talent when a broad portfolio of work experience is not available.

(2) Promote training and awareness of racial bias in the workplace. We recommend this is mandated during employee induction for new managers and senior management, as well as for all individuals responsible for recruitment, pay and promotion decisions. Ideally, some form of unconscious bias and cultural diversity awareness should be mandatory for all employees. This will ensure a culture of diversity and inclusion continues to be nurtured, as our research shows that racial bias affects people of all ages.

(3) Communicate the business case and strategy for race diversity. McKinsey's Diversity Matters report shows that organisations with racially diverse senior teams experience 35% greater financial returns. For employers to achieve diversity at senior levels, they must review the gaps in their workforce demographics and action plan for change. This also requires understanding of the changing demographic their customers, communities, clients and service users.

(4) Set objectives for managers at every level around ensuring diversity and inclusion in their teams. These objectives should include ensuring diverse talent has equal access to training, development opportunities and progression programmes.

(5) Senior leaders to recognise that racial harassment and bullying exists and take action to erase it from the workplace. Deliver a clear message from the top that this behaviour is not tolerated from managers, colleagues, clients or contractors; ensure that perpetuators are dealt with; and ensure channels for reporting of harassment and bullying are accessible and straightforward.

(6) Review succession planning lists for diverse talent. If BAME people are under-represented on the list, targets should be set to increase the diversity of this pipeline and an action plan developed that focuses on the progression of existing BAME employees and a review of external recruitment processes. Targets should be short, medium and long-term to ensure momentum is sustained.

(7) Encourage and deliver mentoring. There is a high demand for mentors from the BAME workforce and job seekers. Employers should engage in reciprocal mentoring – creating their own programmes or joining existing ones like the Business in the Community Cross Organisational Mentoring Circles.

(8) Leaders to act as sponsors. We need leaders to act as active sponsors, using their influence to mention the names of the BAME people when development or progression opportunities are being discussed – especially when there are no people from BAME backgrounds in the room during these conversations.

(9) Identify diverse role models in their workplaces. The trend of no career role models must be reversed, as it currently sends a message to BAME people that despite their ambition there is little evidence that certain employers support equal progression. Employers should take specific action to ensure that Caribbean, Chinese and mixed race role models in the workplace are visible. Diverse role models drawn from all

ethnic groups demonstrate that BAME employees are able to thrive and progress no matter their ethnicity. It is equally important when focusing on the next generation – 1 in 4 young people in primary and secondary school from a BAME background deserve to see role models 'like them' in all aspects of UK society.

(10)   Take leadership. Executive team and board members to take personal commitment for bringing the issue of race inequality to the top table within their organisation and with their peers. Sectors with low representation of BAME employees can learn from leading sectors in order to introduce immediate steps for change.